

Pre-Exposure Preparation (PEP) Handout

The primary goal of PEP is to enhance resiliency through understanding normal responses to unusual stressors. Resiliency involves the development of skills that improve coping in order to accomplish the mission and preserve or enhance one's physical and emotional health. Past experiences help us better prepare for managing the stress of future events, so that we have the expectation of succeeding and are not defeated by lesser challenges than those we have already overcome in life. Education, training, and advanced practice under increasingly challenging and stressful demands serve as the foundation for successful performance under stress by cultivating self-confidence, team unity, ways of thinking that emphasize success and strength during adversity and behaviors that promote health. These experiences may serve to buffer the individual from the detrimental effects of stress on performance and health. However, due to limitations in training scenarios and our inability to fully anticipate every event that may occur, even the most experienced person may have an unexpected reaction to some new experience. Each of us may have times when our resources for coping with stress are challenged to their fullest. PEP training is designed to help the member know what to do in these times to maximize performance and health during periods of unusual stress.

Step	Focus	Recommendation
Step 1	Be aware of your own functioning and watch for: Feeling keyed up, on edge or restless; feeling like you have to be watchful for threats; being "jump;" irritable or anger outbursts; sadness or crying; muscle tension; unexplained fatigue; difficulty concentrating; preoccupation with the event; changes in sleep habits; changes in appetite; social withdrawal	<p>Allow yourself to acknowledge that you may be experiencing stress. Denying that you are experiencing stress may set you up for either physical or emotional consequences that can interfere with your ability to perform and may prolong the time required to return to optimal performance.</p> <p>Talking about your feelings of stress can accomplish two things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It helps you recognize that you are experiencing stress and the need to take better care of yourself ● Allows you and others an opportunity to acknowledge that many people are experiencing a similar response <p>Remind yourself that you are having a normal response to an abnormal situation and that the response will likely be short-term.</p>
Step 2	Identify and practice positive stress behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attend to basic needs- sleep, nutrition, exercise, hydration ● Develop strong team relationships ● Develop a sense of confidence about your own and your group's ability to accomplish the mission ● Be a team player—think "we" instead of "me" ● Make social connections (talk about thoughts and feelings with others, help others who are in need) ● Remember past experiences of having overcome challenges ● Avoid seeing challenges as insurmountable problems ● Remind yourself why you joined the military and engaged in the mission to establish personal <i>commitment</i> to the task at hand ● Practice your spiritual beliefs and utilize them as a source of support
Step 3	Avoid unhelpful coping behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Insufficient sleep, nutrition, hydration ● Overuse of alcohol, tobacco, caffeine and drugs of abuse ● Breakdown of respect for those in the chain of command ● Breakdown of respect for lawful orders and directives ● Breakdown of communication within the chain of command ● Social withdrawal ● Avoidance of important tasks (excessive procrastination)

Seek prompt professional assistance if you experience thoughts of harming yourself or others, hallucinations or delusions, severe depression, abuse of alcohol or drugs or if any symptoms last for over a month and negatively impact functioning at work or within social relationships.